



Testimony of Newtown Creek Alliance
Prepared by Steve Lang
Presented to the New York City Council
Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management
re: Int 495

Good morning, my name is Steve Lang. I am here to speak on behalf of the Newtown Creek Alliance (NCA). The NCA is a community-based organization that works to “restore, reveal and revitalize” Newtown Creek. We are unique in New York City because we advocate for environmental remediation, industrial retention and community health. Where many might see opposing points of view, we have been able to find quite a bit of common ground. We appreciate the opportunity to bring this point of view to the discussion today.

My testimony today will outline our strong support for Intro 495.

The neighborhoods surrounding Newtown Creek host a disproportionate number of truck-based waste transfer stations relative to the rest of the city. Collectively, these transfer stations handle almost 40% of the over 12 million tons of waste moving through New York City annually. This is the densest concentration of waste transfer stations in the five boroughs, and this clustering negatively impacts community health and public infrastructure.

Since the first modern oil refinery was founded on the creek in 1867, the waterway has served as a conduit to a host of industrial businesses. Almost 9 million tons of supplies and product were floated on the creek at the peak of shipping in 1950. Since then, heavy industry has waned, giving way to a mix of wholesale handling and distribution uses.

The concentration of truck-based transfer stations, however, is a relatively new occurrence. They represent the more recent era of improvisation that came after in-city disposal options (landfilling and incineration) were shuttered without a backup plan for export. During this time (90s and early aughts), transfer stations popped up in industrial zones like the South Bronx and Newtown Creek, and we’ve been stuck with this clustering ever since, even though a more decentralized array of “wasteshed” infrastructure makes sense. Today’s legislation represents small step back toward a more efficient and equitable strategy for handling solid waste.

Today I am here to support a piece of legislation that will eliminate unused permit capacity in the city’s three most overburdened communities and subsequently ensure that

new capacity throughout the city will be handled at marine transfer stations within each borough. Moving essential bulk materials by barge is a best practice that is more efficient economically and environmentally. A single barge has the same capacity as 28 – 56 long haul trucks, depending on the material. Compared to other transportation modes, barge transport of bulk materials is safer in terms of worker injuries and generates far fewer emissions of particulate matter, hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, CO₂ and nitrous oxide on a per ton mile moved basis.

We see innovation with our local recyclers that gives us hope for the continued diversification of the waste stream and for reducing the city's dependence on export long-term. For example, one local company has invested in a new electronics waste recycling operation, doing the majority of the demanufacturing on site. Multiple operations are restoring degraded bulkheads to transition from truck-based operations to maritime transit. Barges carrying metal, plastic, glass and fill material are a common sight on Newtown Creek.

The most recent Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, Vision 2020, identifies the Newtown Creek as one of the city's largest Significant Maritime Area (SMIA) in terms of area and employment. Steep job losses halved the number of jobs in the SMIA in the 80s and 90s, and today, employment in the Newtown Creek SMIA totals approximately 15,000 jobs. Untapped potential exists in co-locating specialized recycling, reuse, repair and refurbishing operations. In addition to diverting waste from export, these more specialized operations create jobs that are better quality and better pay than transfer for export.

While today's legislation is a step in the right direction, NCA hopes our leaders will take additional steps that will send correct market signals toward the reduction of waste export, job creation in more specialized types of product recovery, and increased reliance on maritime transit.

Thank you again for your leadership and the opportunity to speak today.